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“Measuring Up” Report Confirms Master Plan Philosophy, Ignores Recent Progress

Baton Rouge: The national “Measuring Up” report, released today by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, compared Louisiana to the other 49 states in five broad areas ranging from pre-college preparation to graduation rates. While Louisiana’s grades as compared to last report were mixed, the report clearly shows areas of progress.

This year’s report notes Louisiana improvements in the following areas:

- * The percentage of high school students who take upper level math and science,
- * The percentage of high school graduates who immediately enroll in college,
- * Affordability to attend a public four-year college or university
- * Retention and five year graduation rates
- * The number of Louisiana college graduates

The Commissioner of Higher Education termed this year’s report “informative and reinforcing but incomplete.”

“Actually, the ‘Measuring Up’ report reinforces the philosophy and strategy of Louisiana’s *Master Plan for Public Postsecondary Education*. It confirms that we’re finally getting it right in our efforts to focus on increased student access and improved student success through the aggressive, comprehensive approach that addresses student achievement from pre-kindergarten through college,” Savoie said. “While we are concerned about the grades, we realize that the methodology, a comparison of Louisiana to all other states, provides little room for marked annual improvements. Louisiana’s reform efforts are taking hold but the reality is that change will come over night. We have to continue our progress.

Savoie noted the report gave Louisiana a lower mark in affordability because it notes that Louisiana does not have affordable private institutions despite progress made in public college costs. All other affordability indicators improved or remained the same. The report also gave Louisiana a lower mark on completion despite showing 4% more students graduating in five years. The report noted that retention at the community colleges was far below the top states in the country. In *Measuring Up 2000*, the community college number was not counted due to the fact that it is a new system.

We believe that the report would provide a more complete look at the state of education in

Louisiana if it included a grade for effort, for example, in recognition of Louisiana's significant, and in many cases *nationally-recognized*, initiatives in such critical areas as teacher education reform, pre-kindergarten to grade 16 coordination, and improved college access for all students. "

Savoie referred to several recent accolades Louisiana has received in recognition of the state's progress in these and other areas, including:

- SHEEO Case Study - Louisiana was selected as one of five states that will be highlighted in a future national publication on model PK-16 reform efforts.
- Grapevine Ranking - Louisiana has been recognized as second in the nation in the percent change of new funding allocated to higher education.
- Harvard/NGA Study - Louisiana was one of five states selected to participated in a literacy workshop to shape policy for the nation as part of the federal "No Child Left Behind" legislation.
- Affordability-- Louisiana was recognized by the Lumina study for its affordable tuition.
- *Education Week* - Louisiana's K-12 Accountability System was recognized for.....

"Perhaps the most glaring omission of the report is the absence of any recognition of Louisiana's tuition exemption program called TOPS," Savoie said. "The report only acknowledges state support of very narrowly-defined 'need-based' financial aid. TOPS is certainly increasing access to postsecondary education in this state and while it is not exclusively offered to students based on need, it certainly is providing assistance to students who qualify for need-based aid. That is worth noting."

Savoie pointed out that Louisiana students who qualify for TOPS also qualify for federal student aid, an indication that TOPS is assisting a significant number of economically disadvantaged students who want to enter college and earn degrees.

The Measuring Up Report will continue to serve as a catalyst to drive the on-going reform efforts that are underway in this state. I firmly believe we are making progress. Our challenge is to maintain our momentum so that sweeping improvements can take root," Savoie concluded.